

FORT GEORGE ISLAND, NEAR FORT GEORGE
FLORIDA.

HABS No. 15-1.

HOUSE OF ANNA MADAGEGINE JAI

AND

SLAVE QUARTERS - DRIVER'S CABIN

HABS
FLA.

16-FOGEO.V

1-

Duval Co.

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT NO. 15

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY.
BERNARD W. CLOSE-DISTRICT OFFICER,
1005 BISBEE BUILDING, JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

HISTORICAL DATA

FORT GEORGE ISLAND

Fort George Island has no important historical significance antedating Zephaniah Kingsley's establishment of a slave-trading outfit there.

Original Spanish records do not indicate that there were missions or a settlement (white) before John McQueen procured a concession under Royal Order of October, 1790. Whether McQueen actually lived on the Island is uncertain, but it was entailed to his son-in-law, J. H. McIntosh, who lived there from 1804 to 1812, when he embarked upon the enterprise of the Patriot War against Spain in 1812, upon the failure of which he did not return. Kingsley secured the Island through a mortgage from McIntosh and moved there 1817 and in the 1820's or early 1830's established the elaborate slave outfit. Kingsley died 1848 and for years the estate was in litigation and soon after the civil war was acquired by Rollins.

Early history at the mouth of the St. Johns River on the north side centers almost entirely on Battan Island a small island south of Fort George immediately on the river. There are plenty of authentic records to prove this.

On the south end of the Island was the ruin called the "Tabby House" or "Ghost House". The shell mounds, said to have been forty feet high, were intact and many relics were found in them when the shell was removed to pave the roads.

There were large fields on the north called the Sand fields and larger fields on the east called the Cotton Fields. All these fields were under cultivation, up to and during, the Civil War. There were ditches and remains of corn hills all through the woods on the north end of the Island, showing that the other portions of the Island had been under cultivation in some remote past. At this time, 1869, large trees^{were} in these ditches and over the corn hills.

The Quarters houses were intact (1869) and many negroes still lived in them.

The plantation house on Fort George called the "Big House" consisted of the central two-story building and four corner rooms. The central first floor room was divided by large folding doors at a point where the hall wall now stands and two double doors of white panelled wood which opened on the north and south piazzas, were in place of the present single walnut door. There was another chimney and fireplace on the west of the living room exactly like the one on the east. There were a chimney and fireplace in each of the four corner rooms.

The second floor remains about as it was at that time, 1869, except that the stairs entered the upper hall where ~~now~~ the window is ^{now} located, and, of course, there was no bath room.

The attic contained two prisons with iron bars in the two small windows, which gave, not outside, but onto the small hall between the prisons. The doors were heavily studded with nails and had large strap hinges and padlocks. There was an oak post in the center of each prison more or less studded with nails. These prisons may be reached by opening the trap door which still remains in the ceiling of what is now the bath room of the second story.

The stairs to the second story ran up from the south porch, and the entrance to the attic was from the hall, with a narrow staircase up to the Lookout which was said to have been used, not only to look for approaching vessels, but also to keep watch for indians and upon all the activity of the plantation. It was said that the timely approach of visitors was thus secured, and that the plantation was never unprepared for either friend or foe.

The basement or cellar was dry and well lighted and was arranged for constant use. The kitchen which had a large fireplace was under the southeast room, the food being carried up a stairway which was placed under the stairway on the south piazza. Meals were probably

served either on the piazza or in the living room.

A large and very heavy pine table remained in the living room. It was of home construction and may have been used as a dining table.

The southwest basement was a storeroom and had a vestibule where the servants waited to receive their rations. The N. W. room was concealed, having no entrance from the outside, and having steps and a double door between the two corner rooms on the west. This entrance was so carefully concealed by oleander trees that it was not discovered for some time. This room was said to have been used for the storage of contraband goods. The old stillage now in the cellar was found there.

Ma'am Anna's name was Anna Madagigene Jai, meaning Anna, supposed to be a princess of Madagascar. Zephaniah Kingsley had married her when he was in Africa, in gratitude for saving his life, when it was threatened by the natives. He brought her to Fort George Island where she lived until her death.

Ma'am Anna's House was about as at present except the roof of the piazza did not connect with the main roof but stopped under the second story windows, the stairs having the usual roof under them protruding from the piazza roof. The north room was at that time, 1869, divided into two rooms, probably used as parlor and sitting room.

The front south room may have been Ma'am Anna's dining room and the back room the kitchen, but the large size of the fireplace (now walled up with a flue above), in the front room would suggest the reverse.

On the second floor there were only two rooms with a landing between, and the north room did not contain the pine cupboard. The north room was supposed to have been Ma'am Anna's room, and the south room was used for the children.

The stable consisted of the tabby building and the white brick building. The door of the tabby building was small and had a latticed gate somewhat similar to the gates remaining in the cellar.

The stocks were bolted to the floor in the second story of the brick building, and the "whipping post" was just outside the door of this building in the angle of the two buildings. (Perhaps it was only a hitching post).

There was a white picket fence all around the two houses, its existence being the line of cedars on the east, turning west about where the small garage or schoolhouse now stands; the west line was inside the old hickory trees. On the north of the "Big House" a tabby walk ran to the river which was probably three times as far from the house as at present. In the center of this walk was a circular erection about three

feet high said to be either for smudges or for signal fires. As it was large for smudges/opinion favored the idea of signal fires. Probably it was used for both. The picket fence may have crossed the front of the house near this place.

The northeast room of the "Big House" bore the marks of grape shot and several shot and unexploded shells were picked up nearby.

The old well was in use, having a sweep and bucket. It was known and used by all the whites and negroes in the neighborhood.

Cherry-laurel trees grew on each side of the walk to the river, with mulberry trees on the west, and further on, a fire grove of old and prolific lemon trees. West of Ma'am Anna's House were orange trees and the remains of a flower garden screened from the cemetery by a thick badge of bitter-sweet orange trees. In the old cemetery grew narcissus, jonquils, old rose bushes and a very tall date palm. On the south was a grove of purple and white fig trees, and on the east, the cedar trees had been planted as a hedge, but had long outgrown their purpose. In front of Ma'am Anna's House was a large group of bananas, several large orange trees, and crepe myrtle trees. In the yard between the two houses was the remains of a somewhat formal planting, a century plant, lantanas, etc.

Outside of the fence the avenue of cedars running east was in its prime. Laurel trees formed an avenue to the stables, and also to the quarters as far as the knoll where the club gates now stand. Beyond this there were no large shade trees, except the live oak about half way to the quarters and another near the west center cabin. These two trees were in their prime and nearly as large as at present.

There were thirty-six cabins in the semi-circle, and there was a fig tree in front of each cabin. There were several wells in front of the cabins; it was said that there was a well for every pair of cabins. There were small gardens back of the cabins.

Palmetto Avenue reached from the quarters to the first "branch" or small stream. It was plainly unfinished, as the planting was incomplete at either end.

Pride of India trees grew about the mule yard back of the stable and about the site of the grist mill.

FORT GEORGE DURING 1869 AND AFTERWARDS.

The following data is furnished by Mrs. Gertrude Rollins Wilson, daughter of John F. Rollins who bought the property from the Kingsley heirs.

Upon taking possession of the property Mr. Rollins made certain changes; adding two rooms to the "Big House" by connecting the corner rooms on the east and west, removing the chimney on the west, and several other chimneys, erroneously believing that the mild winter of that year

was typical of all north Florida winters.

The latticed walk between the two houses was built at this time and the clapboard addition to the stable for a carriage house.

The north room in Ma'am Anna's House was converted into a dining room, and the other rooms into kitchen and laundry respectively. It was at this time that the house lost its name of Ma'am Anna's House and became the Kitchen House. The upper north room of this house became the plantation office and the pine cupboards were built; while the south room was reserved for the white foreman.

On the water front a dock was built with a boathouse and bathing place. Most unfortunately the tabby from the servants' houses on the west side of the semi-circle was used for this boathouse. No one regretted this in later years more than Mr. Rollins, nor did he cease to regret the strap hinges and wooden latches that, in the first rush of improvements and repairs, were replaced by modern hinges and white china knobs.

A double row of cedar trees was planted in a wide sweep to make an appropriate approach to the north porch of the house. A few of these remain but most of them have fallen into the river.

Home Avenue south to the Quarters was planted and also a windbreak of cedars from the house west to the marsh.

The cemetery was levelled and all landmarks buried.

The land on the south side of the place was planted in nursery stock for orange groves up to the line of bitter-sweet orange trees which defined the cemetery. The site of the cemetery was left undisturbed and beyond it was placed a garden for small fruits and vegetables.

All the land south of Cedar Avenue was planted in orange trees to a line drawn from the most easterly quarters house to Home Avenue, where a windbreak of pine trees was planted. South of this windbreak sweet potatoes and corn was usually planted. The pecan grove was planted, and the land on this side being very moist at that time, the remainder was devoted to sugarcane and water melons.

At this time, 1886, certain changes were made in the houses at the Homestead. The central room in the main house ("Big House")* was divided as at present and the stairs moved inside. The walnut doors were substituted for the large folding doors in the hall. A windmill was erected with an octagon shaped tank three stories high. This supply of water from the old well was so plentiful at that time that not only was there ample for the houses but the fountains were placed on the lawn and connections made for watering the garden and lawns.

"APPROVED:

Bernard W. Close
Bernard W. Close,
District Officer."

Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.

Addendum to
Fort George Island
House of Anna Madagegine Jai
and Slave Quarters-Driver's Cabin
Fort George Island
Duval County
Florida

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20001

ADDENDUM TO
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
FORT GEORGE ISLAND

See also HABS FL-15 for additional drawings.